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THE STROKES THAT WIN

IN "Tennis for Women" by Molla Bjurstedt (Doubleday, Page & Co.), Miss Bjurstedt, the champion woman tennis player of the world, devotes a brilliant chapter to the art and science of the driving strokes—forehand and backhand. The chapter is aptly entitled "The Strokes That Win." Even were there not many other valuable chapters in the book, this one would in itself make the volume a significant contribution to the literature of tennis.

Her conclusions as to how a hard, crisp, clean, accurate driving stroke is acquired, are pithily summed up as follows:

1. Face the plane of the ball with your side turned toward the net.

2. Swing your racquet well back before hitting, and follow through after the ball is hit with a steady, firm swing that goes through at least half a circle.

3. Start your stroke on the foot farthest away from the ball and finish on the other foot, going forward as the hit is made.

4. Coördinate the full weight of your body and the power of your arm at the moment of impact of racquet and ball.

5. Train your feet so that they will always be in proper position when you reach the point where you intend to make the stroke.

6. Do not smother your stroke by getting too close to the ball.

7. Make your backhand strokes as confidently as your forehand; never avoid the use of the backhand.

8. Hard drives are the result of perfect coördination, not brute strength.

9. Watch the ball.

Speed she considers essential to place a return where an active opponent will not reach it; that, she says, is the purpose of speed. Therefore, the player will not only need speed, but should try to send the ball just over the net so that it will travel the shortest distance to the point at which it is aimed. The whole idea of tennis, she argues, is to send the ball quickly to a given point; hence obviously to select the shortest route to that point and propel the ball with all possible speed.

"I have no patience," she wittily adds, "with the gentle drives which majestically describe tall parabolas."

Under no circumstances, she advises, should the backhand be spared. It is just as important to have a good backhand as to have a good forehand. "If you start running around balls to take them on the forehand, you are in a fair way never to learn the game."

The backhand, it is patent, does not admit of quite so free a motion as the forehand. Moreover, it brings into play muscles which one is not accustomed to use. For these reasons it seems very difficult at the beginning; and it baffles many players because it seems hard to hit the ball effectively with the arm across the body. Yet, as a matter of fact it is a simple enough stroke—no harder to learn than the forehand drive.

Of how many girls (and the review-

er may add men) do you hear the remark, that "they are weak on their backhand!" Most girls are vulnerable on the returns sent on their left or backhand, when they would be nearly as strong backhand as forehand if only they would study the stroke—and practise. Of course it is hard to attain equal force with the backhand and the forehand drive, for the position of body and arm is not advantageous. Yet, with practise and experience, a very strong ball can be delivered.

Miss Bjurstedt cautions that the foot-work and the swing of the drives will not be learned in actual play; they must be tediously acquired by long practice in which only the two strokes—forehand and backhand—are used. Here it is that playing the ball against a wall or fence will be useful if you cannot find a partner who is willing to give up the time to tap balls to you. It often helps much in the development of one's game to find a girl who also wants practise in driving; then you can take opposite sides of the net and drive to each other by the hour.

The best drives are made with some deliberation; it is always well to pause in the back swing for a fraction of a second to sort of "get together." Then you can come through with a splendid sweep.

"But I have all that I can do to reach the ball; I am glad enough to hit it without bothering to take a position," says a player.

Deliberation and position are comparative matters, but by playing carefully you will find that you can reach most balls in time to return them in form. Getting to the ball is often a matter of strategy, but reaching the

ball in a position to drive carefully is due to clever footwork; you can discover by careful practice just the foot to start on to bring you to the forehand drive with the left foot out and to the backhand drive with the right foot out.

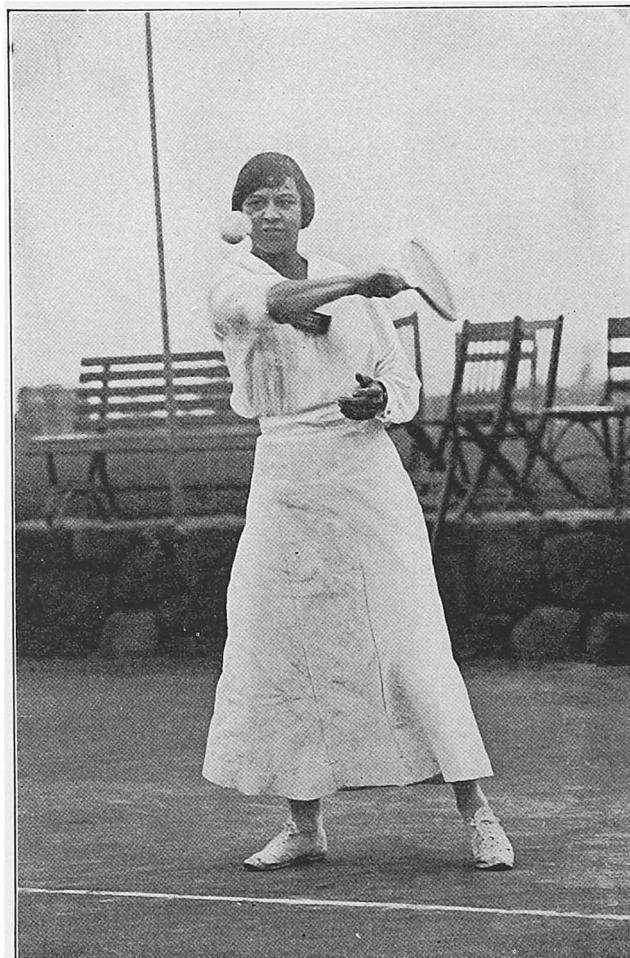
"When dancing you manage your feet with at least a casual regard to formality; certainly you will not let them care for themselves, although after a time they do care for themselves without conscious attention. It is quite the same in the footwork of tennis; you will go toward a ball remembering just how your feet must be placed when you reach it; and if you diligently pay attention to these positions they will soon become second nature to you." The author warns her readers that the body swing can be overdone to such a degree that one leaps at the ball. She says she has seen many pictures of herself and of other players with both feet off the ground at the crest of a drive. This is due to over-eagerness and is a rather bad fault, for it leaves one out of position for a quick return; it is hard not to pounce at a fairly bouncing ball, but one loses rather than gains pace by taking it in mid-air. "Of course it is spectacular, but aerial tennis is not good tennis and should not be imitated."

Another point is that the starting of the swing well before the point of impact and the following through with the racquet long after the ball has been sent away are essentially involved in every well-hit drive. No control of pace and direction of ball is possible with a mere poke of the racquet. The drive will only go away clean and sweet after the long and sustained swing. Opin-

ions differ on just how long this swing should be. "I go through nearly three-quarters of a circle on a hard drive, but a half-circle is quite enough, the ball being hit in the middle of the arc. It is far better to swing too much than too little; the longer swing does no harm, and you may find that you have better control with the very full follow through."

The drives—forehand and backhand—thus being easily the most important strokes in tennis, a woman may learn any number of trick plays, she may have a splendid service, but if she cannot drive hard and accurately, she will never be a real tennis player. For every ace that she wins with the spectacular smash or the lightning service, she will win a dozen aces with the homely drive.

The drive being the foundation of the woman's game of tennis, she can be a first-class player knowing only the two drives. "Neither Mrs. Bundy nor myself can really do anything but drive. It is different with the men; the first flight of players must know the whole game. It is enough for the woman to drive equally well on both hands."



The Beginning of the Backhand Drive
Miss Molla Bjurstedt

Therefore, Miss Bjurstedt urges that women learn to drive. "Perhaps I place too much stress on the drives, but I think most players will agree with me that no adequate woman's game can ever be built up on a foundation other than the drive. Driving is my game; I am quite sure that at least twenty girls in this country could beat me if I tried to play a net game, while, on the other hand, if I were forbidden ever to volley, my game would not noticeably lose in strength."

Again, however, the caution that driving is more than merely getting the ball back across the net. For the true drive sends the ball swiftly and surely to an exactly predetermined place in the court. "It is the easiest stroke to play and the hardest stroke

to play well." For good driving demands the utmost in coöordination, a precise combination of arm, foot, body, and eye. Hence it is that good drivers are scarce among both men and women. And, when it comes to the backhand drive, there are but few women who are not weak.

As to the "driving" game for wo-

men, any woman may be a good driver if she takes the trouble to learn the stroke and then constantly to practice it. If most women are weak on their backhands that is because they will not practice; they will run around a ball in order to take it on the forehand instead of steadily using the backhand, until they gain confidence.

As enunciated by this tennis champion the principles of both drives are identical. Both are achieved by facing the line of the flight of the ball—that is, standing with one's side to the net—with the weight of the body resting on the foot farthest away from the oncoming ball. Then the ball is taken with a long sweep of the racquet, the body going forward with the racquet so that, at the time of impact with the ball, the weight of the body is added to the force of the racquet, while the finish finds the player on the foot opposite to that on which the stroke began. In all drives the body should be going forward as the stroke is made. A flat-footed drive or a drive made when leaning backward lacks both force and direction. The coördination of the body and the arm gives speed.

Miss Bjurstedt directs that the ball should be taken in the center of the face of the racquet, for there the elasticity is greatest, the racquet should be nearly horizontal and straight out in the line of the arm. For this reason the player should bend over to drive low balls, rather than scoop them up with a vertical racquet.

On the swing-back of the racquet, tighten the grip and firmly control the racquet with the wrist. This will control direction, while a slight snap of the wrist as the ball is taken adds crisp-

ness to the stroke. Only practice can teach a player just how much the wrist determines the direction of the ball. The player should "feel" the ball.

"And, as in every stroke, keep your eye on the ball. It is not possible to hit cleanly unless you see the ball through every part of the stroke. When you see a ball, it loses all mystery; otherwise you will wonder why a perfectly planned shot went off quite contrary to the plans. Keeping the eye on the ball is not as easy as it sounds; you are tempted to look at your opponent, and you will probably look at her in spite of all your good intentions, but certainly in practice you can devote yourself exclusively to watching the ball. If you do not watch the ball in practice you will not watch it in a game. The drive comes down to getting the right position before the stroke and the right swing in its execution; you cannot attain the true swing unless you have the proper position."

Miss Bjurstedt then describes the way she plays the forehand drive, "which is the most useful stroke in tennis; the stroke with which you return practically all of the ground balls that come on your right hand; a stroke that you must master if you are to play even a passable game; and its mastery is purely a matter of care and practice."

This drive she makes with a free, hard swing carried all the way through. Take a position, she advises, facing the plane of the oncoming ball; keep your eye on the ball; rest your weight on your right foot and, as the ball rises from the ground, swing back your racquet until it is well behind you; poise an instant on your balance and then swing the racquet around so that it will

catch the ball just before it reaches the top of the bounce. As the racquet comes in contact with the ball, incline its face slightly downward; carry the stroke through until your racquet is straight across your body. At the moment of impact of racquet and ball, your body should be going forward; at the finish you will be leaning forward with your weight on your left foot.

The distance at which you should

stand from the ball depends upon your reach; you should be far enough away to meet the ball comfortably with outstretched arm.

The inclination of the racquet gives a top spin which brings a hard-hit ball down near the base line. Without the spin the ball would fly out of the court.

Illustrations of Miss Bjurstedt and of other noted women tennis players in action add to the interest and value of *Tennis for Women.*"



Driving a Short Lob

Miss Mary Browne